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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 001541

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DEPT FOR WHA/CEN AND PM

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#)

SUBJECT: NEW ACTING MINISTER OF DEFENSE RECEIVES AMBASSADOR

REF: MANAGUA 1223

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Ambassador met with Ruth Tapia Roa, the new Secretary General and acting Minister of Defense (reftel), on June 4 to discuss issues of mutual concern. Although Tapia's office delayed granting the appointment for several weeks, the meeting was cordial. She led the meeting on behalf of the Ministry, clearly having taken charge from Dr. Juan Umana, the previous "administrator," who was also present. Tapia did not initiate any point of discussion, but generally pledged to continue cooperation in a number of areas.

¶2. (SBU) The following is a summary of topics raised by Ambassador:

-- White Paper Process: Ambassador mentioned that military roles in the region have changed, and we hope that the Ministry and Army continue to support the 2005 Defense and Security White Paper elaborated by both institutions and endorsed by the FSLN most recently in September 2006. Tapia responded that the White Paper is a "good base," but continued (rather cryptically) that "all things can be improved."

-- Property: Ambassador commented that, despite an overall beneficial and cooperative relationship with the Army, the unresolved property cases remain a point of contention.

-- SOFA: Ambassador thanked the Ministry for help in approving a series of diplomatic notes for New Horizons, ship visits, and other activities. He explained that a blanket SOFA could further streamline cooperation and reduce the bureaucratic burden on both parties. Tapia replied that she would support a process to simplify procedures.

-- MANPADS: Ambassador reiterated that achieving the full destruction of Nicaragua's MANPADS stocks remains a priority for the USG, although this is not simply a bilateral issue as the threat of MANPADS to civilians has been recognized by the OAS, UN, and other organizations.

¶3. (C) Comment: It is unlikely that Tapia will establish independence for the Ministry of Defense beyond the will of the Army or the Presidency. President Ortega declined to make her a full Minister and clearly intends to retain personal control over defense and security policy.
BRENNAN